



Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
U.S. House of Representatives

Bill Shuster
Chairman

Washington, DC 20515

Peter A. DeFazio
Ranking Member

Mathew M. Sturges, Staff Director

May 2, 2017

Katherine W. Dedrick, Democratic Staff Director

Mr. Gene L. Dodaro
Comptroller General of the United States
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

Recent events have highlighted continuing concerns over the airline industry's treatment of passengers. For example, on April 9, 2017, a passenger aboard United Express Flight 3411 was forcibly removed to accommodate airline employees. Instances like this reinforce the importance of strong, clear Department of Transportation (DOT) consumer protection rules.

DOT is responsible for executing and enforcing airline consumer protection laws established by Congress. It may also develop regulations based on more general statutory authority, giving it broad powers to prescribe regulations, standards, and procedures related to air travel. DOT has used its powers broadly to oversee airline compliance, investigate reported violations of DOT regulations, and enforce rules and regulations. For example, in 2015, DOT issued 15 consent orders related to aviation consumer rule violations and assessed \$2.4 million in civil penalties.

Since 2009, DOT has taken steps to enhance consumer protections. For example, in 2009, DOT issued a comprehensive final rule, "Enhancing Airline Passenger Protections," that expanded regulatory protections for aviation consumers. Further, in 2011, DOT completed a rulemaking that strengthened the rights of air travelers in the event of oversales, flight cancellations, and delays. More recently, however, DOT tabled a rulemaking that would provide additional passenger protections in connection with the new administration's freeze on regulations. As Congress and DOT consider the need for additional protections, we would like GAO to review the efficacy of existing protections and DOT oversight.

We therefore request that GAO conduct a study that examines DOT consumer protection policies. Specifically, the committee requests that GAO undertake a review that addresses the following questions:

- (1) What consumer protections does DOT provide to airline passengers?
- (2) To what extent do U.S. carriers' policies vary from DOT's consumer protection rules?

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- (3) How, if at all, have past changes to consumer protections since 2009 affected consumer and airline behaviors?
- (4) What are the trends in consumer complaints since 2009?
- (5) How does DOT enforce its consumer protection policies and what improvements could be made in DOT oversight?

If, in the course of conducting this study, members of your team have any questions, they should feel free to contact Alex Burkett with the Subcommittee on Aviation at (202) 225-9161.

Sincerely,



PETER DeFAZIO
Ranking Member



RICK LARSEN
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Aviation